

Wait till Bill Dahlberg hears about this! (Restructuring Today)

The US Chamber of Commerce is pulling together what it calls a "massive" energy organization to promote competition, security and jobs in the energy industry, Chamber CEO Thomas Donohue told reporters yesterday.

The goal is "commonsense" policies, he added.

William Dahlberg was chairman of Southern Co for several years. He was able to get the US Chamber in Washington on record against national control of energy marketing policy because that didn't fit in with Southern goals.

Thus at a time when pro-competition forces were eagerly trying to get markets open, Dahlberg was able to get America's Chambers of Commerce on record against what we considered to be their own best interest.

Dahlberg has been retired for a few years and yesterday the chamber told the press about its plans to work for big changes in America.

Policy must make sense nationally and globally first then it must make sense in the states, Donohue said of the change in plans.

That's a major departure from the days when then Southern Co CEO Bill Dahlberg got the chamber to go on record in favor of local choice.

The chamber hasn't found a chief for its proposed Institute for Energy Security, Jobs and Competitiveness, Bruce Josten said.

He's executive vice president for government affairs. The chamber is looking at applications and interviewing candidates.

They will be "highly skilled, qualified" individuals, Donohue said.

The body of the group will be new hires as well for the most part and the chamber has its sights on excellence.

Other goals cover reforms to immigration and education policy and rebuilding America's infrastructure.

What about coal-fired plants?

How about finding new technology to help clean coal become a big producer of electricity?

New technology, if it's down the road, still doesn't exist, Josten said.

Nuclear is a leading option, he added, citing other countries' progress.

He's cool to a carbon cap with a lot of other things attached to it in this economy."

"Is someone going to tell me how we are going to replace that in a month, two months, a year, two years, three years or six years?" he asked rhetorically.>

He agreed that new basic research and government funding may make a difference over time but right now, "if you are going to talk carbon cap," remember, half the power for 300 million people comes from coal.

The national energy policy must change because "a lot of people out there are trying to consume a lot of energy and signing up to control it," Donohue said.

They know that without energy "you can't drive a competitive economy," he added. Policy cannot solve the problems piecemeal, he said.

"You can't say we are going to change the rules on this tax or that tax or this drilling or that drilling or this refinery or that refinery without looking at the total system."

So what the chamber wants is a common sense energy policy that lets us have access to the extraordinary resources in this country, Donohue said.

One problem with policy making stems from the "very retail" quality of energy, Donohue believes.

People see and feel the price of heating fuel and the price of electricity.

America has those problems because it isn't taking advantage of available supplies, Donohue added.

Two major changes in policy could help tremendously, he said.

The ability to drill in more places and the ability to build more nuclear plants. This is beginning to happen but by now we are far behind other nations in these two areas.

China has been able to "drill off our coasts" but we haven't been able to do that.

The chamber wants policy that doesn't drive industry out of the country because of the price of natural gas.

He wonders whether America's national energy policy "is based on naiveté or stupidity" and is beginning to believe its both," he said.